

Diarrhea in Chinchillas

By: Dr. Lani Steinohrt

Section: Overview

Diarrhea in chinchillas is an increase in the water content of fecal pellets with or without an increase in the frequency or volume of the [bowel movements](#). Contrary to diarrhea in many other species, any changes in the normal appearance of a chinchilla's fecal pellets are a concern and should be addressed with some urgency.

Causes

- Drugs (especially antibiotics)
- Toxins
- [Stress](#)
- Infectious agents (bacterial, viral, fungal, parasitic)
- [Dietary](#) indiscretion (eating inappropriate food or material)
- Metabolic diseases
- Intestinal [parasites](#)
- Inadequate amounts of roughage in the [diet](#) in the form of grass or timothy hay

Diarrhea can cause dehydration and electrolyte disturbances. It can also alter the normal fecal and intestinal pH (acidity or alkalinity) leading to disruption of normal bacterial flora that leads to abnormal bacterial growth and subsequent septicemia.

What to Watch For

- Watery, soft, mucous and misshapen fecal pellets
- Change in fecal color
- Sudden loss of appetite – anything over 24 hours is potentially an emergency.
- Lethargy – excessive sleepiness or decrease in activity
- Swelling of the abdomen (stomach area)
- Abdominal discomfort – chinchillas often act as though they can't get comfortable by frequently changing body positions from lying outstretched and switching from side to side, to sitting hunched and breathing rapidly.

Diagnosis

Veterinary care is aimed towards determining the cause of the diarrhea so that proper treatment recommendations may be offered. Some cases of diarrhea are short lived, but

unless the cause of the diarrhea is elucidated, serious consequences may occur.

[Diagnostic](#) testing includes a very thorough history and physical examination by a veterinarian experienced with chinchillas. Additional tests may include:

- Examination of the feces (flotation, direct smear and gram staining)
- A complete blood count (CBC) and serum chemistry panel
- Radiographs (X-rays)
- Abdominal Ultrasound

Treatment

Treatment is based on the cause of the diarrhea and may include:

- Dietary modification
- Fluid Alkaline water
- Motility drugs that change the rate the ingesta (ingested food) is passed through the intestinal tract
- Antibiotics
- Dewormers

Home Care and Prevention

Administer only [medication](#) prescribed by a qualified veterinarian and provide fresh water at all times.

Do not change the diet unless prescribed by a qualified veterinarian and encourage your pet to eat frequently. Closely monitor fecal output to ensure adequate food consumption. Observe your chinchilla's activity and appetite, and notify your veterinarian immediately if improvement is not noticed in a couple days or if symptoms worsen.

Always keep the diet consistent by offering a free choice of timothy or grass hay (fresh and free of molds) and a limited quantity of fresh, high quality chinchilla food (no seeds or nuts). Avoid abrupt changes of brands or pellets. Make all changes or additions of foods very gradual. Keeping your pet on a consistent and regular diet is imperative. Avoid feeding only pellets.

Have all new pets checked by a veterinarian, and then annually or biannually thereafter, and maintain a stress free environment.